

REMARKS

I. Status of the Application

At the time of the Action, Claims 1, 2, 4, 10, 11 and 13 were pending, Claims 5-9 and 14-16 having been withdrawn in response to an election of species requirement, and Claims 3 and 12 having been canceled. The Action rejects all pending under Section 112, second paragraph and Section 103(a). The issues raised in the Action are addressed hereinbelow.

II. The Section 112, Second Paragraph Rejections

All pending claims stand rejected under Section 112, second paragraph as indefinite based on the inclusion of the term "common wafer container" in Claims 1 and 10. The Action requests clarification for the meaning of this term. Applicant hereby confirms that the term is intended to mean that each of the gripping arms acts on the same wafer container, *i.e.*, a "common" wafer container.

In view of this explanation, Applicant submits that the meaning of this term is clear, and respectfully requests that the rejection under Section 112, second paragraph be withdrawn.

III. The Section 103(a) Rejection

The Action rejects Claims 1, 4, 10 and 13 under Section 103(a) based on Japanese Patent No. 11-145243 (JP 243) in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,183,186 to Howells et al. (Howells). The Action states that JP 243 teaches a device for conveying wafer cassettes that includes:

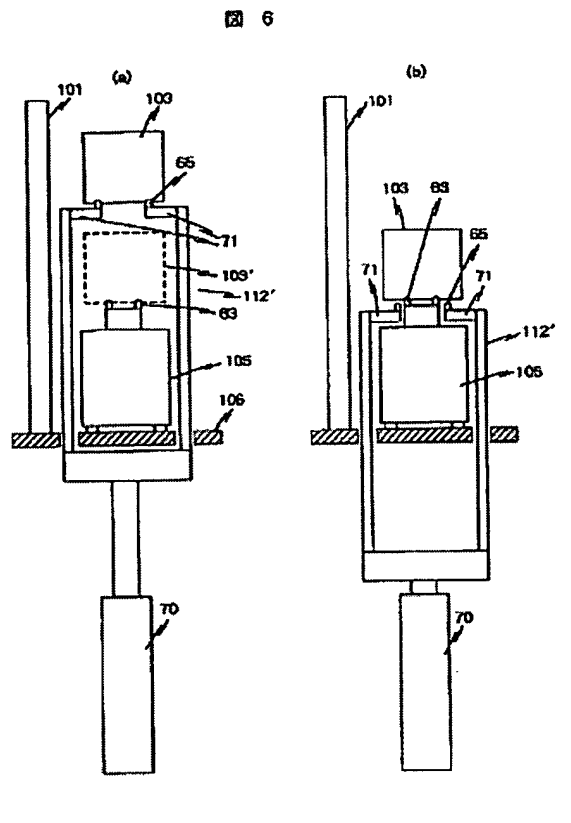
- a horizontal conveyor (111) positioned adjacent to and below the plurality of process devices;
- a vertical conveyor (112') for raising the wafer cassette from the horizontal conveyor to the process device's load ports;
- said vertical conveyor forming a hollow housing and further comprising gripping arms (71) which extends towards one another and hold a common wafer carrier;
- a controller for automatically moving the various components of the overall system automatically;
- wherein the conveyors operate in a clean area.

The Action at page 3. The Action concedes that JP 243 fails to disclose screw actuators for the vertical lift device or hollow housings at each process device. The Action then cites Howells as teaching a process device (12) with a loading station (10) comprising:

a housing;
an inlet in said housing for accepting transported wafer
cassettes; [and]
an elevator (20) for lifting and lowering wafer cassettes
(16).

Id. at 3. Based on these findings, the Action concludes that it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in this art to conceive the subject matter of the listed claims, in that one would provide the device of JP 243 with individual housings as taught by Howells "in order to decrease the amount of clean area the production facility would require." *Id.* at 4.

In response, Applicant respectfully directs the Examiner's attention to amended Claims 1 and 10, each of which recites, in pertinent part, that the gripping arms are movable relative to the side walls of the housing. This is in stark difference to the configuration of the device shown in JP 243, in which, as shown in Figures 6a and 6b thereof, the components 71 are fixed to and move with the side walls of the housing they are mounted to (see Figures 6a and 6b of JP 243 reproduced below).



Clearly, JP 243 fails to disclose or teach at least this element of Claims 1 and 10.

As pointed out by Applicant in Applicant's prior response, Howell fails to disclose a pair of gripping arms that extend toward each other. Howell is cited only for the disclosure of a hollow housing, an inlet in the housing that accepts wafer cassettes, and an elevator. There is nothing in Howell that suggests that the device of JP 243 be modified such that the structures 71 that support the wafer cassette from underneath be mounted to the side walls of the housing so that they are movable relative thereto.


In fact, if the structures 71 were movable relative to the side walls of the housing, such modification would defeat the purpose of the device. The device is lifted by the action of a piston 70, which acts on the floor of the housing. If the structures 71 were movable relative to the housing, they would be redundant to the movement provided by the piston. Thus, one of ordinary skill in this art would not modify the JP 243 device to include such a redundant function.

In view of the foregoing, Applicant submits that it would not have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in this art to conceive the subject matter of Claims 1 and 10. Neither reference shows a pair of gripping arms that are movable relative to the side walls of the housing to which they are mounted. Modifying the JP 243 device to have movable gripping arms would defeat the purpose of the device. Accordingly, Applicant respectfully requests that this rejection be withdrawn.

IV. Conclusion

Inasmuch as all of the outstanding issues raised in the Action have been addressed, Applicant respectfully submits that the application is in condition for allowance, and requests that it be passed to allowance and issue.

Respectfully submitted,



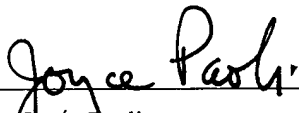
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